

NOW SERVING YOU HERE IN THE 18TH DISTRICT

Now that the 2002 session has come to an end, I have moved my legislative office into the 18<sup>th</sup> District so that I can be more accessible to constituents. Through the remainder of the year, you can contact me at the 18<sup>th</sup> District office in Kelso at the old Kelso Depot.

Also, I will be spending one day a month in Clark County for citizens in the southern part of the district who want to discuss issues or areas of concern. Keep an eye in your local paper for these Clark County district office days.

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*Rep. Orcutt serves on the House Natural Resources Committee, the Finance Committee and the Children and Family Services Committee.*



Rep. Ed Orcutt

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Representative Ed Orcutt

2002 SESSION REVIEW

A LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FOR CONSTITUENTS OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

Dear friends and neighbors,

The 2002 legislative session came to an end within the scheduled 60 days. While pleased that the taxpayers will not incur the added expense of a special session, the unwillingness of lawmakers to adequately address the budget deficit and other issues will wind up costing taxpayers far more than any special session.

The state operating budget remains in desperate trouble, with expenditures exceeding revenues by \$1.4 billion in the current biennium. Rather than solving our budget problems to protect taxpayers in this current recession, I fear we've placed an even greater burden on them by delaying the inevitable.

In the process, we've jeopardized public safety and emergency services that are critical for our communities, especially at this time.

The greatest progress made on transportation this session was assuring that voters will have the final say on a highway funding package in November. Some progress was also made on reforms to make government more efficient and accountable to the taxpayers. These reforms are the result of two bills I was able to get passed into law during my first legislative session.

My thanks to those of you who took the time to contact me during the 2002 legislative session. Your ideas and concerns are always welcome, and I am also here to help you whenever you have problems in your dealings with state government.

It's an honor to serve as your representative.

Sincerely,

Ed Orcutt  
 State Representative



DEMOCRAT BUDGET RAISES STAKES  
— AND DEBT — FOR TAXPAYERS

To the surprise of few, the state operating budget adopted by Democrats in the Legislature in 2001 turned out to be fiscally unsound. That budget spent \$700 million more than expected revenue, and as the state’s economy continued its predicted decline, lawmakers were forced to rewrite it during the 2002 session to bring it back into balance.

Unfortunately, Democrat budget writers drafted a new plan that actually makes it worse – doubling the deficit by spending \$1.4 billion more than anticipated revenue.

The budget uses Enron-style accounting tricks to cover this deficit, spending nearly all of the state’s reserves and relying on a scheme to sell off future tobacco settlement payments in exchange for one-time cash. The up-front money will be used to pay operating expenses over the next 14 months, but will cost the taxpayers for the next 30 years.

I agree with the state treasurer and attorney general who both have said this strategy is irresponsible. Frankly, it is credit-card spending at its worst. Like a family that has maxed out their credit cards to buy food, in the end, they’re out of money, they still have a family to feed, and now they have bills to pay from their mounting debt.

Perhaps worst of all, the budget protects the state bureaucracy, while cutting spending for education, health care, public safety, and services for the truly needy. There is no serious effort to reduce the size of government. The budget still increases state spending by nearly 7 percent over the last biennium. How many families, businesses or organizations do you know that respond to a decline in revenue by increasing spending?

The results, once again, are predictable. By the Democrats’ own admission, this budget will leave taxpayers with a \$1 billion shortfall at the start of the next biennium.

DON’T TAKE MY  
WORD FOR IT . . .

Here’s what others are saying about the Democrat plan to borrow money against the state tobacco settlement payments. The proposal would use the borrowed cash to pay operating expenses over the next 14 months and will cost us revenue for 30 years.

**“ . . . a bad deal for Washington taxpayers.”**  
- Attorney General Christine Gregoire  
(*Seattle P-I*, 3/5/02)

**“ . . . terrible fiscal policy.”**  
- State Treasurer Mike Murphy  
(*Bremerton Sun*, 3/8/02)

**“ . . . a bad idea . . . We’ll pay a high price for this gimmick.”**  
- *South (King) County Journal* editorial  
(3/14/02)

**“ . . . too big a gamble for the state.”**  
- *Tacoma News Tribune* editorial (3/6/02)

**“ . . . funny-money games.”**  
- *Everett Herald* editorial (3/8/02)

TRANSPORTATION  
TAX INCREASE  
BROUGHT TO VOTERS

After a two-year battle on a transportation tax package, Republicans finally prevailed in our efforts to give voters a say. A \$7.8 billion transportation plan will go on the ballot in November. It includes the following:

- A 9-cent gas tax increase phased in over two years (5 cents in 2003 and 4 cents in 2004)
- A 1 percent increase in the sales tax on new and used cars.
- A 30 percent increase in weight fees for trucks

I voted for this bill, because I felt it was important to give citizens this choice to make improvements to our state’s transportation system. At the same time, I had reservations about the plan. Specifically, I am concerned about the sales tax increase, which may push local car sale business into Oregon and cost us jobs here in southwest Washington.

The law prohibits me from using this newsletter to advocate or oppose this upcoming ballot measure. But if you have additional questions about this transportation funding plan, you may contact me at my 18th District legislative office.

PUBLIC SAFETY COMPROMISED  
IN STATE BUDGET

Despite the gimmicks that were used, the state operating budget still fails to adequately fund the one item we all agreed would be a priority this year – public safety. The budget effectively eliminates funding for cities and counties used for public safety and emergency services, such as police and fire protection.

Clark County was supposed to receive \$679,000 in the original budget, but that funding has been eliminated. \$796,000 for Cowlitz County and \$598,000 for Lewis County was also cut from next year’s budget. Most cities in the 18th District also had their funding eliminated, with the exception of a few communities such as Yacolt, Pe Ell and Napavine, which will receive drastically reduced funding.

We introduced several amendments that would have preserved this critical public safety funding, but these proposal were rejected by the majority party.

Furthermore, the Legislature attempted to save money by allowing drug dealers out of prison early. This is simply inexcusable. There may be no higher priority to our citizens at this time and there is perhaps no more important function of government than maintaining the safety of our communities.



EFFICIENCY REFORMS BECOME LAW

In my first year in the Legislature, one of my goals was to improve the way government serves its citizens. I introduced legislation this session to implement reforms to improve efficiency.

■ STREAMLINING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

I introduced House Bill 2768 to streamline reporting requirements for the Department of Social and Health services, so that more resources could be directed into benefits for needy families. My hope was to allow the agency to spend less time and resources issuing reports and more time performing its true mission, which is taking care of people.

The bill passed the legislature, but to my disappointed the governor vetoed the measure. The governor says his administration can review these reporting requirements on its own, but I have to wonder why it hasn’t happened before now. One of my goals was to help make government agencies more efficient, and I will continue to work toward that goal.

■ PREVENTING MISUSE OF WELFARE FUNDS

I also introduced a bill that would prevent the misuse of cash assistance provided to needy families. House Bill 2767 would prohibit the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer cards at gambling establishments, parimutuel-wagering sites or to buy lottery tickets.

EBT cards are similar to debit cards that are provided to welfare recipients to purchase food or obtain cash for living expenses. With the growing presence of gambling establishments, the temptation for using public assistance dollars for this kind of activity is growing.

The EBT cards are an effective means of distributing and tracking benefits. At the same time, we want to make sure the taxpayers’ dollars are used for their intended purpose – to provide assistance to the families who truly need help. To the degree that we can prevent any misuse of funds, we can help even more people get back on their feet. I’m pleased to report that this bill was signed into law.

RELIEF FOR  
LANDOWNERS  
APPROVED

The House also gave final approval to House Bill 2765, a measure I introduced that would give people who purchase timberland more time to file the paperwork necessary to avoid a property tax increase.

House Bill 2765 would extend the time deadline from 30 days to 60 days for landowners to prepare timber management plans to maintain their current-use taxation under the Open Space Timber Program. Missing this reporting deadline could force landowners to pay back taxes for years when they didn’t even own the land.

Many times people aren’t even aware that they’re required to submit these plans, and by the time they’re notified of the requirement, they don’t have enough time to get the needed documentation.